

2.6 EQ – ingredients of motivation: part 2

Slide 1

In part 1 of the ingredients of motivation, we started to look at some common factors that researchers have said keep them motivated. We considered having a sense of purpose, engagement with networks and aligning your work to your personal values.

In this second part, we look at two further ingredients of motivation.

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The next one is similar to having a sense of purpose; some of the ingredients relate to having a sense.

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...that you are making progress: getting recognition in some way, a sense of achievement at creating something new or solving a problem...and knowing that you are becoming an expert and gaining skills.

Slide 4

Having a sense of mastery and that you are making progress is so important – particularly in the world of research and academia where we are all too often holding ourselves up to criticism.

Research is often a marathon rather than a sprint, and a lot of the time you are on your own with few benchmarks. Researchers, particularly when they are early in their career, are going through a learning process most of the time. When we learn new things we go through different stages of competence – illustrated here in this diagram

In stage 1, we don't know what we don't know, so we are said to be unconscious of our incompetence. At this stage, we may think that something will be easy or fun, and will be motivated to get started, OR we may fear that it will be difficult, so our motivation to get started will be low. Are you putting anything off for fear of not being perfect? You need to jump in to get started on the process.

The next stages are where the learning takes place – when we become aware of all the things we don't know or need to learn, and that we are not very good at yet (known as the conscious incompetence stage). But with time and practice, we enter stage 3 (consciously competent) – we know what we need to do and how to do it, but we need to keep paying attention in order to do it well. Between stages 2 and 3, we are very aware of what we are unable to do, so this can be demotivating – at this time we need to:

- break things down to see progress quickly.
- We need encouragement: seek constructive feedback and advice from more experienced colleagues who can share what helped them learn.

- Plan days where you work on a variety of tasks so that you don't feel as though you are struggling all of the time.

With more practice and experience we may eventually reach stage 4: unconscious competence, where we are on autopilot – which is great for monotonous, repetitive or mechanical tasks, but is risky if we are doing anything that requires careful thought and a critical mind – we may miss important ideas or data if we are not fully conscious of our actions.

- Something that can keep you conscious of what you are doing and how you do it, is to get involved in teaching or reviewing.

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The final ingredients that we will look at in this presentationK.

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... and are those relating to developing autonomy, a sense of independence and becoming a professional with leadership skills. Knowing you are making an impact on your career, being recognised for your expertise and specialism. Having the freedom to choose what you work on and how you do it.

Slide 7

Research has shown that when we have autonomy over our work, we feel more motivated. Think about whether you are being managed or supervised in a way that is helping you to gain autonomy over your work, to build your confidence and sense of ownership.

This simple leadership model shows that as time progresses, the area of authority of a manager or PI should diminish over time, as freedom over the work is handed over to you (the researcher) reporting to them.

When you are new to a job, project or learning process, it may be unwise to have too much autonomy initially as you may lack appropriate skills or knowledge. Too much too soon can lead you to make unnecessary mistakes and undermine trust and confidence.

So, at the start it might be reasonable to be directed by your manager on what to look at or how to do things. But they should gradually be handing over authority to you by seeking your advice, encouraging you to explore and report back to them, within the parameters set by your job description or the scope of the project. Ultimately and hopefully relatively quickly you should be responsible for taking care of things on your own

We all have a preference for where we feel most comfortable on this spectrum from directive to non-directive or in other words, from being the authority to more of a consultant and facilitator.

Your PI may have a preference for being very directive. This is great if you are new or haven't gained skills or knowledge yet, but can be undermining, demotivating and erode trust and confidence if you are experienced. Think about what you could be doing to show your manager that you can take ownership from them: perhaps you could start with suggesting that you meet them less frequently

(saving them time), and point out some evidence of how you can manage more on your own, or, instead of going to them with questions, go to them with solutions to choose from.

You could even share this model with them at a development review or appraisal and ask them where they think you both are on it.

If they have a preference for being non-directive, this is great if you are experienced, but if you are new, or less experienced, it can lead to unnecessary mistakes, stress and time-wasting, which will also undermine your confidence and lead to a lack of motivation. If this is the case, perhaps you could ask for more direction but put a time limit on that and discuss what would make you feel happier about taking ownership.

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In this presentation, we obviously haven't covered everything that could help to keep us motivated – the problem is that we are all different.

Many of the other tips, advice and suggested activities throughout this one resource will help with motivation.

But you might find some extra reading or understanding of well-known motivation theories could help you to think objectively about what will help you feel more motivated – or what is missing that leads you to feel demotivated.

Two example models, which have stood the test of time are Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's Hygiene factors. You will find links to further reading about these in the resources list.